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Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda**

Programme questions: evaluation

Triennial review of recommendations from the programme evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of OIOS recommendations three years after the Committee had endorsed them (see [A/37/38](#), para. 362). The present triennial review determined the extent to which the five recommendations emanating from the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) were implemented.

In the recommendations, OIOS addressed various aspects of ECE relevance and effectiveness in executing its mandate. At the conclusion of its fifty-seventh session, the Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the OIOS evaluation report. The triennial review determined that all five recommendations were implemented. The full impact of the implementation of the five recommendations thus far could not be assessed as ECE had not yet fully operationalized some of the recommended policies and strategies. However, some evidence of concrete positive outcomes was noted.

In recommendation 1, OIOS addressed the need for ECE to develop and operationalize a knowledge management strategy that addresses how institutional knowledge and expertise will be captured, stored, shared and integrated into its work programme and activities. A knowledge management strategy was developed and operationalized, resulting in the systematic capture and sharing of institutional knowledge and expertise. This recommendation was implemented.

* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.

** [E/AC.51/2020/1](#).



In recommendation 2, OIOS addressed the need for ECE to conduct a mapping of intersectoral and interdivisional initiatives and activities in order to identify opportunities to strengthen the linkages and collaboration between its main functions and subprogrammes. ECE completed the mapping exercise, which was disseminated and discussed among senior management and which resulted in the nexus approach, which ensured greater collaboration and stronger linkages between divisions and sectors. This recommendation was implemented.

In recommendation 3, OIOS addressed the need for ECE to develop a proposal, for presentation to the Executive Committee, that explored the nature of its global focus, including both possible advantages and disadvantages to extending its worldwide reach. A paper was developed mapping the reach of ECE products and was discussed in informal consultations of the Executive Committee in January 2020. Member States determined to keep the matter under review and not to introduce the item in formal session at the present time. The Executive Committee remained seized of the issue. This recommendation was implemented.

In recommendation 4, OIOS addressed the need for ECE to examine how its activities under existing norms, standards, conventions and related review mechanisms and statistical work contributed to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. The activities, mechanisms and methodologies of all subprogrammes have been examined and adjusted to ensure that they contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. This recommendation was implemented.

In recommendation 5, OIOS addressed the need to undertake a mapping of existing partnerships and cooperation with non-State actors and develop specific proposals for expanding and strengthening such cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. ECE undertook the mapping of existing partnerships and strengthened cooperation with civil society organizations. However, cooperation with the private sector was still identified as a gap in partnerships. While there had been no comprehensive approach for strengthening cooperation with the private sector that was presented to the Executive Committee for adoption, practical experience had been gained through the participation of the private sector in activities at the subprogramme level. This recommendation was implemented.

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-seventh session, in 2017, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division, on the evaluation of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) ([E/AC.51/2017/5](#)).
2. The Committee expressed appreciation for the report and the positive overall assessment of the work of ECE. In paragraphs 110 to 120 of its report ([A/72/16](#)), the Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations contained in paragraphs 57 to 61 of the OIOS report.
3. The present report was issued pursuant to a triennial review of the recommendations and serves to examine the status of implementation of the five recommendations contained in the evaluation. The review also addressed, where possible, the extent to which implementation of the recommendations contributed to programme changes.
4. The methodology for the triennial review included:
 - (a) Review and analysis of the biennial progress reports on the status of recommendations, which are monitored through the OIOS recommendations database;
 - (b) Analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from ECE on various topics related to the recommendations;
 - (c) Remote interviews conducted with a purposive sample of ECE staff.
5. The present report incorporates comments received from ECE during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with ECE for its formal comments, which are contained in the annex. OIOS expresses its appreciation to ECE for the cooperation it extended in the preparation of the present report.

II. Results

6. OIOS made five recommendations to ECE: (a) to develop and operationalize a knowledge management strategy; (b) to conduct a mapping of intersectoral and interdivisional initiatives and activities; (c) to develop a proposal, for presentation to the Executive Committee, that explores the nature of its global focus; (d) to examine how its activities can contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals; and (e) to undertake a mapping of existing partnerships and cooperation with non-State actors and develop specific proposals for expanding and strengthening such cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.
7. In its review, OIOS determined that all five recommendations were implemented. There is some evidence of concrete positive outcomes resulting from the implemented recommendations. The implementation status of each of the five recommendations is described below.

Recommendation 1 **Knowledge management strategy**

8. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

The ECE secretariat should develop and operationalize a knowledge management strategy that addresses how institutional knowledge and expertise will be captured, stored, shared and integrated into its work programme and activities. In particular, the strategy should address the risk of losing institutional

knowledge anticipated with staff departures, as discussed in the present report, and build upon existing organizational guidelines for knowledge sharing.

Indicator of achievement: Knowledge management strategy with target dates for implementation of each subprogramme.

9. In line with the recommendation, ECE developed a knowledge management strategy in 2017.¹ The strategy was presented to the Executive Committee for information at its eighty-ninth meeting in the same year, where the document was welcomed by member States. Document review indicated that implementation and operationalization of the strategy was mostly completed in 2017. The ECE knowledge management strategy was a road map for knowledge management that identified tools, tasks and mechanisms related to the capture, access and exchange of knowledge, with deadlines for completion, and with responsibility designated to various units for developing and implementing the different components of the strategy. Implemented outputs of the strategy with respect to knowledge capture have included, for example, the development of a Commission handbook, guidance documents on meeting planning and servicing, a revised template for project management and a consultant and individual contractor management tool.

10. Staff interviews and document review revealed that, as of January 2019, a few strategy outputs to promote knowledge exchange remained ongoing, such as brown bag lunches and periodic messages to remind staff of available guidance and/or resources. The outputs included the continuing maintenance of information to ensure that generated knowledge was placed in the appropriate repository. Such repositories were actively maintained, and knowledge capture and dissemination were included in the programmatic work systematically. In that regard, staff interviewed indicated that senior managers provided overarching guidance on knowledge production and dissemination. Generally, all staff were expected to contribute to the knowledge of the organization and were responsible for capturing important outputs in their area of responsibility. Focal points were designated in each division to assist in gathering original content developed in their areas to store on common repositories, such as divisional or team-level shared drives or databases. That approach allowed for easy access and periodic review of materials to ensure continued relevance. The repositories included documents on a broad range of institutional issues, including budgets, workplans, audits, reports, presentations and speeches, training, donor agreements and correspondence, among others.

11. This recommendation was implemented.

12. Staff interviews suggest that the ECE knowledge management strategy has raised awareness of the importance of capturing, managing and disseminating knowledge across the programme, and that its application has resulted in a culture shift. In addition, staff interviews confirmed that the preparation of deliverables for the strategy clarified recurrent processes and helped to streamline related workflows. ECE agreed that ensuring ongoing work to guarantee that knowledge was captured, stored, shared and integrated into its work programme and activities was an ongoing responsibility of ECE senior management.

Recommendation 2

Mapping of intersectoral and interdivisional initiatives and activities

13. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

The ECE secretariat should conduct a mapping of intersectoral and interdivisional initiatives and activities in order to identify opportunities to

¹ Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), Executive Committee, Informal document No. 2017/6.

strengthen the linkages and collaboration between its main functions and subprogrammes. This exercise could include an assessment of the main challenges and opportunities in enhancing the cross-cutting nature of its work.

Indicator of achievement: Options for strengthening intersectoral and interdivisional initiatives and activities presented and endorsed by the Executive Committee.

14. In responding to the OIOS recommendation, ECE conducted a mapping of intersectoral and interdivisional activities in the Commission. The mapping exercise itself did not discuss or identify opportunities to strengthen linkages and collaboration. However, the document produced on it was disseminated and discussed among senior management and informed the elaboration of a separate strategic document on the main directions of ongoing ECE work on further alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals, which was presented to the Executive Committee on 18 May 2018.² The document included a detailed discussion of the benefits of collaborating across sectoral divisions and identified four nexus areas where multiple Sustainable Development Goals converged, and which would be the focus of interdivisional efforts.

15. The nexus areas identified in the document were: (a) sustainable use of natural resources; (b) sustainable and smart cities for all ages; (c) sustainable mobility and smart connectivity; and (d) measuring and monitoring progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.³ Each nexus area had a nexus team with terms of reference outlining the benefits of the nexus approach, the relevant Goals associated with it, the key tasks of the nexus teams and their composition. In addition, each nexus team had a workplan with deliverables and assigned leads. They utilized a matrix approach so that staff could contribute not only to the sectoral work at the subprogramme level but also common initiatives involving several subprogrammes.

16. The mapping exercise also served as input for the document on strengthening cross-sectoral action and mobilizing resources in support of implementation of the 2030 Agenda (E/ECE/1482), a background paper prepared for the sixty-seventh session of ECE in April 2017.

17. This recommendation was implemented.

18. The mapping exercise has led the nexus approach, which was designed to enhance intersectoral and interdivisional collaboration. An example of a nexus approach output was the background document prepared in 2019 for the sixty-eighth session of ECE entitled “Toolbox of the Economic Commission for Europe: instruments to support the transition to smart sustainable cities” (E/ECE/1489). The document offered a toolbox from which local and national governments could select knowledge products to support their transition towards smart, sustainable cities, which included thematic products cutting across a variety of sectors and divisions such as: affordable, decent and healthy housing and energy-efficient buildings; sustainable transport in cities and road safety; and new approaches to public-private partnerships, innovative financing, policies, regulation, institutions and technologies.

Recommendation 3 **The nature of ECE global focus**

19. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

² ECE, Executive Committee, Informal document No. 2018/12.

³ General information on nexus or “high-impact areas” is available at: www.unece.org/high-impact-areas/general-introduction.html.

The ECE secretariat should develop a proposal, for presentation to the Executive Committee, that explores the nature of its global focus, including both possible advantages and disadvantages to extending its worldwide reach. Given that a large proportion of ECE products are currently being used by a global audience, the proposal will facilitate discussion among member States regarding a strategic long-term vision for the regional and global role of ECE. The proposal should explore resource mobilization and partnership alternatives that will allow ECE to adequately respond to global demands in the future.

Indicator of achievement: Proposal discussed at the Executive Committee with a clear strategic vision outlined for ECE global focus.

20. To implement the recommendation, ECE developed a proposal in the form of a paper, mapping the reach of its products. The paper included a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of a global reach and laid out concrete proposals that could be implemented in that regard moving forward. ECE directors discussed the paper on 13 January 2017. The document was considered by the Executive Committee at its ninety-second meeting in June 2017.⁴ After its review, the Executive Committee indicated that it would continue its deliberations on the subject.⁵ Since that time, there have been no further formal discussions to advance decisions on ECE global reach. At the sixty-eighth Commission session in 2019, the role of ECE was affirmed, with no mention of a recommendation or decision related to global reach (see [E/ECE/1490](#)).

21. Staff interviews indicated that regional priorities had shifted and that there had been some questions raised by member States, including some States outside of the region, as to whether a regional organization such as ECE should have a global reach. While some instruments and activities had a reach beyond the region, those interviewed suggested that that was case-specific and depended upon the consideration of a number of factors, including whether there was capacity at ECE to extend the reach of its instruments and activities beyond the region. The issue had not yet been resolved.

22. In January 2020, the Chair of the Commission requested the secretariat to prepare an update to the 2017 paper to inform the discussions. The paper outlined a way forward for a more deliberate approach to maximizing the benefits and impact of ECE instruments. To that end, four elements were proposed for further consideration, namely: (a) to promote wider use of norms, standards and legal instruments hosted in ECE; (b) to strengthen knowledge management and sharing of expertise with the United Nations system; (c) to deepen the network of partners and institutions with which ECE collaborates; and (d) to continue the close collaboration among regional commissions. During its informal deliberations, the membership thanked the secretariat for the useful and informative paper and decided to keep the matter under review. Some member States noted that the issue should be addressed on a case-by-case basis, as appropriate. It was decided that the paper not be formally tabled at an Executive Committee meeting at that time. OIOS noted that the Executive Committee remained seized of the issue.

23. This recommendation was implemented.

⁴ ECE, Executive Committee, Informal Document No. 2017/18.

⁵ The document was considered at the 92nd meeting of the Executive Committee on 23 June 2017. The Chair's conclusions (EXCOM/CONCLU/92) are available at: www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/EXCOM/Agenda/2017/93Excom-26-September_17/Item_2-Chair_s_conclusions-23.06.2017.pdf.

Recommendation 4
Examination of how ECE activities can contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals

24. Recommendation 4 reads as follows:

The ECE secretariat should examine how its activities under existing norms, standards, conventions and related review mechanisms and statistical work can contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. In particular, methodologies for the country assessments will need to be adjusted. The tools identified by ECE should be incorporated into its overall strategy and workplan for its work in supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Indicator of achievement: Within each subprogramme, review mechanisms and methodologies adjusted in line with the ECE overall strategy and workplan for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

25. OIOS reviewed the progress of each of the eight ECE subprogrammes with respect to whether the examination of activities, mechanisms and methodologies was undertaken to ensure that they were in line with the overall ECE strategy and workplan for the 2030 Agenda. The reviews undertaken and the progress made by each subprogramme are outlined below.

26. Subprogramme 1, Environment, mapped its processes and activities that supported countries in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the context of the Eighth Environment for Europe Ministerial Conference, held in Georgia in 2016, and concluded that the subprogramme could support the achievement of all the Goals (see ECE/CEP/S/2016/5). As part of its ongoing alignment activities, ECE worked with parties to the ECE multilateral environmental agreements to fully align workplans and work programmes with the 2030 Agenda and relevant Goals. For example, the workplan of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution set out activities through which the Convention supported parties in implementing the Goals. Other aligned agreements included the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context; the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes; the Convention on the Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents; and the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters. In interviews, staff indicated that adjustments in the workplans of the agreements had led to stronger linkages between new and existing sectoral activities and the 2030 Agenda.

27. Staff interviews revealed that the environment subprogramme also conducted environmental performance reviews of member States. As a result, such reviews now also include a special chapter on Sustainable Development Goals in the country. The chapter was focused on examining whether there were institutions in place to report on the Goals and whether there was a legal basis to do so. Based on the review, ECE was able to provide recommendations to the countries to assist in better reporting on the Goals.

28. Under subprogramme 2, Transport, the Inland Transport Committee was supported. The Committee was the platform for United Nations conventions and legal instruments that provided regional and global standards on inland transport. In 2017, at its seventy-ninth session, the Committee considered a note by the secretariat on sustainable transport in the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (ECE/CEP/S/2016/5) and requested its subsidiary bodies to align their work with the 2030 Agenda. In 2019, at its eighty-first annual session, the Committee unanimously adopted its strategy until 2030 (ECE/TRANS/288/Add.2), a comprehensive strategy to guide inland transport to a safer and more sustainable future in line with the

objectives of the Sustainable Development Goals. At the time of the review, the implementation of the strategy was under way. Examples of tools that contributed to the attainment of the Goals were the ForFITS (For Future Inland Transport Systems) and SafeFITS (Safe Future Inland Transport Systems) tools, monitoring and evaluation tools that were aligned with the Goals and assisted governments and decision makers in evidence-based decision-making in respect of future carbon dioxide emissions and road safety policies, respectively. The goal of such tools was to help member States understand which data to collect and how to analyse and present outcomes for decisions.

29. The work programme of subprogramme 3, Statistics, was aligned to support the achievement and measurement of the Sustainable Development Goals in three ways: (a) as coordinators and providers of statistics on the Goals; (b) as providers of capacity development support in demographic, economic, social and environmental statistics and supporting the production of statistics and indicators for the Goals in specific subject areas; and (c) as supporters of the collection and dissemination of data on Goal indicators. The subprogramme had developed several outputs and tools that could be used by member States towards their monitoring and reporting of work on the Goals.

30. Some examples of such work included an ECE road map on statistics that was approved in 2017 by the chief statisticians in 60 countries in the region and beyond.⁶ The road map guided member States in setting up efficient measurement systems for Goal indicators, with the support of ECE, which had developed the tools to aid countries in implementing the road map. For example, they had created a template for the assessment of country readiness to provide data on Goal indicators and a practical guide for setting up a national reporting platform for data on the Goals, and they conducted pilot studies of data flows from member States to international organizations responsible for different Goal indicators. The subprogramme also launched a knowledge hub on statistics for the Goals in 2019,⁷ which was a gateway to ECE work and country resources on the topic. ECE planned to complement the effort with a dashboard and database on Goal indicators at the beginning of 2020.

31. In addition, the subprogramme had created models to support the data revolution for the Goals and the modernization of statistical production, which included the Generic Statistical Business Process Model, the Generic Statistical Information Model and the Generic Activity Model for Statistical Organizations. The models provided a universal language that allowed statistical offices to develop common tools using the same reference framework. The statistical subprogramme also conducted global assessments of national statistics systems in partnership with Eurostat and the European Free Trade Association. Staff interviews indicated that, at the initiative of the ECE subprogramme on statistics in 2017, the format of the assessments had been adjusted to include a chapter on statistics for the Goals. Many of the tools created had been taken up at a global level; for example, the road map on statistics was widely used and the Generic Statistical Business Process Model had been developed into a de facto standard and was used across the world.

32. In its strategic framework for 2018–2019, the subprogramme on economic cooperation and integration articulated its work according to the Goals most relevant to its programme, namely Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and Goal 12 (responsible consumption and production). The subprogramme supported the Committee on Innovation, Competitiveness and Public Private Partnerships. The Committee generally mainstreamed sustainable development

⁶ *Conference of European Statisticians: Road Map on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals*, (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.17.II.E.22).

⁷ Available at: <https://w3.unece.org/sdghub/>.

in the mandates of its subsidiary bodies, which included aligning the methodologies for existing country assessments and public-private partnership project assessments with the 2030 Agenda. For example, the Working Party on Public-Private Partnerships in support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the establishment of which was approved by the Committee in May 2016 (see ECE/CECI/2016/2) and by the ECE Executive Committee in September 2016 (see ECE/EX/2016/L.17), had as one of its main priorities the development of international public-private partnership standards and recommendations in a number of sectors and subsectors that contributed to achieving the Goals.

33. At its thirteenth session in March 2019, the Committee had also undertaken a number of activities to advance the 2030 Agenda, including: holding an international policy dialogue about how to measure the impact of innovation policies and public-private partnership projects on achieving the Goals; endorsing the Guiding Principles on People-first Public-Private Partnerships in support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (ECE/CECI/2019/5); revising the methodology for the subregional Innovation Policy Outlook national innovation reviews to look at the contribution of innovation to sustainable development and to analyse and recommend policies using innovation to achieve the Goals; and developing a category of criteria against which to assess public-private partnership infrastructure projects to determine if they were people-first, namely whether they were compliant with the 2030 Agenda.

34. Under subprogramme 5, Sustainable energy, a note was drafted to map the role of the Committee on Sustainable Energy and its subsidiary bodies in achieving the 2030 Agenda (ECE/ENERGY/2018/2). As reflected in the document, the subprogramme found that the Committee's activities spanned a number of Sustainable Development Goals, including Goal 7 (affordable and clean energy), Goal 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities), Goal 12 (responsible consumption and production), Goal 13 (climate action) and Goal 17 (partnerships for the Goals). The activities of the Committee and its six subsidiary bodies covered energy efficiency, renewable energy, cleaner electricity, coal mine methane, gas, resource management and energy security. Based on a review of the documentation and staff interviews, there was a view that the entire subprogramme was already focused on achieving the Goals.

35. The work of subprogramme 6, Trade, was aligned with the Goals most relevant to its programming – Goals 8 (decent work and economic growth), 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and 12 (responsible consumption and production) – in the strategic framework for 2018–2019. The subprogramme supported several intergovernmental bodies that were adjusting their activities and methodologies to achieve the 2030 Agenda. For example, during the third session of the Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards in 2017, member States requested a report on progress made in extending the scope of the evaluation methodology used in its studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade to also capture the impact of non-tariff measures on the achievement of the Goals. The evaluation methodology on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade had been expanded to capture the interplay between non-tariff measures, regulatory and procedural barriers, structural transformation and women's empowerment and was implemented in Armenia, where there was a special focus for supporting the development of female-owned enterprises and increasing their participation in trade. The Steering Committee further reviewed its activities for consistency with the 2030 Agenda and found that the Steering Committee was not used to its full potential to implement the Goals. Several recommendations were made, including a review of the Steering Committee's terms of reference and a suggested list of systemic issues that could form the focus of its improved delivery of the 2030 Agenda.

36. Another example was the twenty-seventh session of the then Working Party of Regulatory Cooperation and Standardization Policies. In 2017, a proposal was presented to strengthen the role of the Working Party as a convening platform for all relevant institutional partners to enhance the role of standards in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. As a result of the ensuing discussion, member States requested the secretariat and Bureau to establish a task force aimed at identifying concrete actions to enhance the contribution of standards to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and other international mandates. In 2018, at its twenty-eighth session, the Working Party supported continued activities in the area of standards for the Sustainable Development Goals. At its twenty-ninth session in 2019, the Working Party approved a new programme of work for 2020 (ECE/CTCS/WP.6/2019/5) that was geared towards the delivery of the Goals.

37. A final example was the programme of work for 2018–2019 of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business, which mentioned the alignment of its activities with progress in trade facilitation and with achievement of the Goals.

38. The work of subprogramme 7, Forestry and timber, supported the Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry as well as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) European Forestry Commission. A review of records showed that the Warsaw Integrated Programme of Work for the period 2018–2021 (ECE/TIM/2017/2–FO:EFC/2017/2, annex I) was adopted by the joint session of the Committee and the European Forestry Commission in 2017 to contribute to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the achievement of the forest-related Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the implementation of the United Nations strategic plan for forests 2017–2030, within the existing mandates of ECE and FAO. Since that time, all regular work and related reporting on forests, forest management and forest products were aligned with the 2030 Agenda. Some of that work included regional contributions to the FAO Global Forest Resources Assessment; joint pan-European reporting on forests and sustainable management in 2020 by ECE, FAO and Forest Europe; a regional workshop on the state of forests in the Caucasus and Central Asia (2018); and a workshop on criteria and indicators for sustainable forest management in the Caucasus and Central Asia (2016).

39. Under subprogramme 8, Housing, land management and population, ECE had aligned its work with the 2030 Agenda through the Standard Working Group on Ageing. For instance, the methodology for country assessments – road maps on mainstreaming ageing – was going to be adjusted along with general guidelines for the mainstreaming of ageing (projected for 2021). Under the housing and land management component, the guidelines for the preparation of country profiles on housing, urban development and land management were updated and endorsed by the Committee on Urban Development, Housing and Land Management in 2017 and were published in 2018.⁸ The updates focused on the review of implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the gender dimension.

40. In 2018, the Executive Secretary developed a strategic document on the main directions of ongoing ECE work on further alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals,⁹ which further outlined how ECE work was aligned with the 2030 Agenda through the nexus approach.

⁸ Available at: www.unece.org/housing-and-land-management/housingpublications/housing-and-land-management-hlm/2018/guidelines-for-the-preparation-of-unece-country-profiles-on-urban-development-housing-and-land-management/docs.html.

⁹ See footnote 3.

41. This recommendation was implemented.

Recommendation 5
Strengthen partnerships

42. Recommendation 5 reads as follows:

The ECE secretariat should undertake a mapping of existing partnerships and cooperation with non-State actors and develop specific proposals for expanding and strengthening such cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals. ECE has established various partnerships within its sectors of work and has been lauded as a strong partner. In supporting the ambitious targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ECE will need to draw on current partnerships and forge new ones, including with more non-State actors.

Indicator of achievement: Current and prospective partnerships are mapped, with proposals for strengthening cooperation in support of the Sustainable Development Goals presented for consideration by the Executive Committee.

43. ECE undertook a mapping of all partners and identified the need to enhance its cooperation and outreach to private sector entities. ECE has developed a list of partners related to the Sustainable Development Goals. Staff interviews acknowledged that ECE needed to enhance cooperation and outreach to private sector entities to support member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda. In that regard, and in follow-up to the recommendation, ECE developed a framework for engagement with the private sector,¹⁰ which was presented for approval to Executive Committee in 2017, as well as a due diligence procedure for agreements with private sector entities,¹¹ which was presented for information to Executive Committee in 2017. These measures were further strengthened by the establishment of a due diligence questionnaire for non-governmental organizations and other entities as donors and partners in July 2019, pursuant to OIOS recommendation 2 in the audit of the management of trust funds at the Economic Commission for Europe (OIOS 2018–084). As at 1 July 2019, all agreement documents with non-governmental organizations and entities other than member States must be submitted to the Executive Secretary accompanied by a duly completed and signed due diligence questionnaire from the entity itself. In 2018, the Executive Secretary's Compact¹² identified private sector engagement in support of implementation of the Goals as one of five objectives for that year. As a result, seven memorandums of understandings with academia and the private sector were established and approved by the Executive Committee. All entities with a memorandum of understanding with ECE can be found on the ECE website.¹³

44. While those efforts were noted, as was the Executive Secretary's emphasis on the need to partner with various entities within the nexus approach,¹⁴ there have not been specific additional overarching proposals to further expand and strengthen cooperation with the private sector in support of the Goals. Rather, progress has focused on specific sectoral activities. For example, practical experience has been gained through the participation of the private sector in standard-setting processes (for example, trade facilitation and agricultural quality standards) or in the context of the road safety trust fund. While the framework for engagement with the private sector has had the likely immediate impact of appropriate selection of business sector

¹⁰ ECE, Executive Committee, Informal document No. 2017/40.

¹¹ ECE, Executive Committee, Informal document No. 2017/41.

¹² Available at: www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/OPEN_UNECE/01_Governance_Framework/2018_Senior_Manager_s_Compact_ECE_paper_copy_signed.pdf.

¹³ Available at: www.unece.org/oes/mou/mou_toc.html.

¹⁴ See footnote 3.

entities and the avoidance of reputational risks for the organization, a broader, more general approach to private sector engagement was still evolving.

45. In relation to other non-State actors, in 2018, ECE established a regional civil society engagement mechanism for the Sustainable Development Goal and 2030 Agenda process of the ECE region.¹⁵ The mechanism was aimed at establishing stronger cross-constituency coordination and ensuring that the constituencies had a voice at such regional intergovernmental forums as the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. The mechanism's constituency did not include private sector actors, but it included academia and trade unions.

46. This recommendation was implemented.

III. Conclusion

47. ECE took important steps to implement the five recommendations, which have led to several positive outcomes.

48. A knowledge management strategy was developed and operationalized and has resulted in a number of tangible deliverables and tools, such as the continuous, systematic and active capture and dissemination of institutional knowledge. The nexus approach strengthened intersectoral and interdivisional collaboration on activities that contribute to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. All subprogrammes, activities, mechanisms and methodologies have been examined and adjusted to ensure that they are in line with the overall ECE strategy and workplan for the 2030 Agenda.

49. However, the question remains as to whether a regional organization such as ECE should have a global reach. That remains a topic of ongoing discussion. ECE had prepared a proposal for the Executive Committee to review on the issue. In addition, while ECE has strengthened its cooperation and partnership with civil society organizations, there was no comprehensive strategy for strengthening cooperation with the private sector that had been presented to the Executive Committee for adoption. Nevertheless, practical experience had been gained through the participation of the private sector in activities at the subprogramme level.

(Signed) Fatoumata **Ndiaye**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
March 2020

¹⁵ See "Concept note: regional civil society engagement mechanism (RCEM) for the SDG/Agenda 2030 process of the European and North American region" (2018), available at: <https://unece-rcem.eu/rcem-concept-note/>.

Annex***Comments received from the Economic Commission for Europe**

This is in reply to your memorandum dated 28 February 2020.

We have reviewed the formal draft report and we are pleased to inform you that we agree with this final version.

We appreciate the evaluation's recognition of our efforts to rethink the focus of our activities and working methods. UNECE will continue to embrace change to ensure effective support for member States in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Economic Commission for Europe will continue to leverage its in-house expertise to achieve a greater impact on sustainable development in the region. Working across the eight subprogrammes, cross-sectoral teams will engage in areas where multiple Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) converge (nexus areas): (a) sustainable and smart cities; (b) sustainable use of natural resources; (c) sustainable mobility, and smart connectivity; and (d) measuring and monitoring progress towards the SDGs.

This nexus approach will enable the development of integrated solutions to clusters of interrelated SDGs and deepen partnerships, including Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs). In line with the four nexus areas, the Economic Commission for Europe will expand and strengthen its network of knowledge partnerships with a wide range of actors, including with other organizations in the United Nations system.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the professionalism of the OIOS evaluation team. We are very appreciative of the fruitful discussions and time invested to consider the complex mandates of the Economic Commission for Europe.

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the Economic Commission for Europe. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution [64/263](#), following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.